

Three stone objects from Plumpton Plain, East Sussex

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Two objects, a stone axe and a pebble rubber, were deposited by C. Vigor in Barbican House Museum, Lewes in 1938 and given the accession number A009.A.185, but appear to have escaped previous report. The find spot was described as '300 yards south of site B and opposite Four Lord's Burgh', which would approximate to a location at TQ36081175, an arable field south of the well-known MBA/LBA settlement site on Plumpton Plain. More recently a flint axe was recovered by Dave McOmish (English Heritage) during an analytical survey of the earthworks of that site.

THE STONE AXE (Fig. 1)

In its present form the axe measures 72mm long with a maximum width of 53mm and a maximum thickness of 32mm. It appears to have suffered no modern damage, but it is unlikely that what remains represents its original form. The butt end was probably longer and, with its flattened oval cross-section and stumpy overall shape, it appears to belong to Class Aii as defined for axes located in Surrey (Field and Woolley 1984). One end of the blade is notably more rounded than the other, but this asymmetry may result from wear during use rather than indicate its original shape. The wide curved butt may represent a reshaping, and this end bears wear marks from having been used with some type of pounding activity.

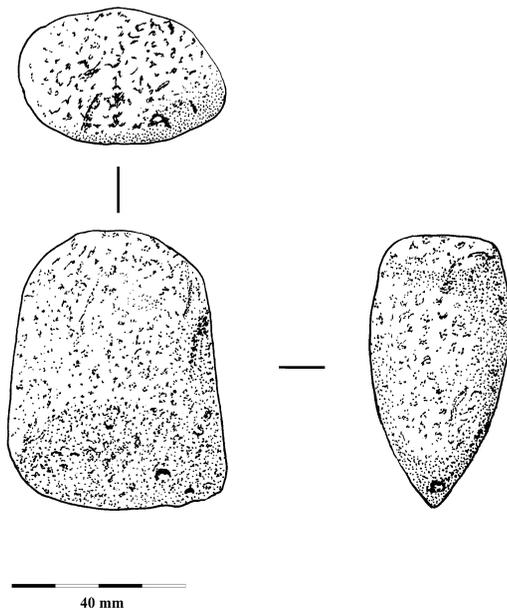


Fig. 1. The stone axe (drawn by Alan Hall).

PETROLOGY by Vin Davis

Microscopically, this is an uralitised gabbro, typified by pseudomorphs of amphibole after pyroxene. The rock falls within the published description for Group 1; a Cornish origin is therefore confirmed, although the exact source of Group 1 axe rock in Cornwall is uncertain. The groundmass consists almost entirely of green pleochroic acicular to bladed amphibole, probably actinolite. Relict augite pyroxene is heavily altered to fibrous or granular epidote – possibly the amphibole clinozoisite. Patches of opaque mineral altered to leucoxene are associated with sphene and actinolite laths. There are indications that some opaque ex-solutional patches are altered ilmenite. Relict, non-ophitic clinopyroxene is fringed by, and partly altered to, fibrous and granular amphibole. Not infrequently, hornblende replaces augite, which was probably the primary pyroxene. The thin section has been archived as Implement Petrology Group (IPG) slide no. Sussex 197.

THE STONE RUBBER (not illustrated)

A flattened, ovoid, water-washed pebble, possibly a beach pebble, of pinkish stone, probably a form of quartz, measuring 73mm long with a maximum width of 47mm and a maximum thickness of 18mm. Wear marks from a pounding or crushing activity are visible on both ends, particularly the blunter of the two.

THE FLINT AXE (Fig. 2; McOmish and Tuck 2004, plate 13)

The thick-butted, flaked flint axe measures 212mm long with a maximum width of 78mm and a maximum thickness of 65mm, and weighs 1.085kg. A large depression, probably marking the position of a fossil, was placed in the centre of the butt, presumably deliberately; although it could have been removed by shortening the axe, its presence is unlikely to have affected the utility of the piece. A number of examples of incorporation of fossilised molluscs and use of natural colour variations within the flint have been noted, and may have been intended to enhance the appearance of the finished object (Butler 2005, 151).

DISCUSSION

Evidence of Neolithic activity in the form of defined scatters of flint-knapping debris was noted during analytical survey of the settlement earthworks (McOmish and Tuck 2004). These working areas, now divided by the MBA/LBA settlement site, lie along the top of the chalk spur to the south-west of enclosure 1 and the north-west of enclosure 4 (McOmish and Tuck 2004, 20 *et seq.*, fig. 5). It appears that the settlement was positioned, deliberately or coincidentally, over an exposure of clay-with-flints that may have been exploited earlier by surface mining.

The Cornish stone axe adds to the nine Group 1 axes recorded by the IPG before 1986 as coming from Sussex, the most common of the non-local rock types identified, and, like the majority of the remainder, found on the chalk downs of

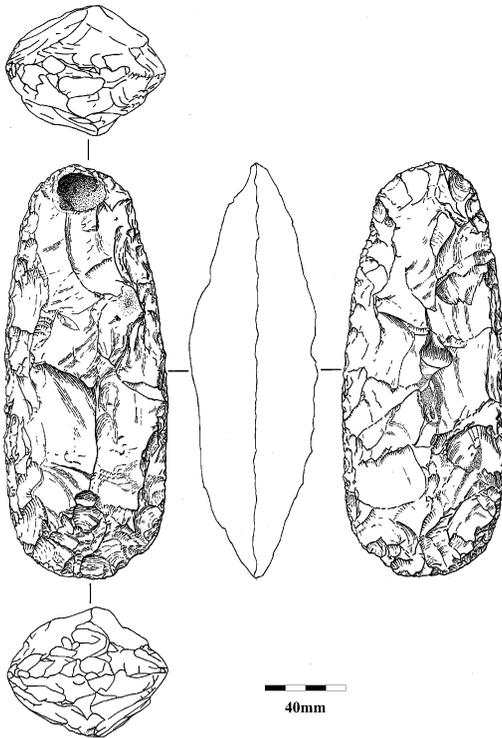


Fig. 2. The flint axe (drawn by Tina Waghorn).

East Sussex (Woodcock and Woolley 1986). Its closest parallel in terms of form comes from relatively close by at Alfriston (Woodcock and Woolley 1986, no. 5) which, interestingly, also appears to have excessive wear on one side of the blade. Although the Plumpton Plain example is not from a secure context, a number of Neolithic axes, particularly those of probable Cornish origin, have been found on Middle and Late Bronze Age sites. Re-use during metal processing and deliberate deposition have both been postulated (Fiona Roe pers. comm.). Also local to Plumpton and Alfriston, although again from an uncertain context, is a serpentinite axe from Blackrock Farm, Westmeston (IPG Sx64) (Weeks 1856; Fiona Roe pers. comm.) probably re-used as a metal smithing stone. A stone axe was found deposited in a Middle Bronze Age water-hole at Terminal 5, Heathrow and, although not thin-sectioned, it is another example of Cornish greenstone and is likely to be Group I (Framework Archaeology 2006, 144–5 and CD), while a portion of a Group I axe had been placed in a pit containing Late Bronze Age pottery at Weston Wood, Albury, Surrey (Field and Woolley 1984, 97).

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to Emma O'Connor for making the axe and the pebble rubber available for study, to Paul Hands (University of Birmingham) for preparing the thin section of the axe, to Dave McOmish for donation of the flint axe, which will be deposited in Barbican House Lewes, and to Fiona Roe for information on the re-use of Neolithic axes.

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Roman road at Bodiam – revised alignment



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INTRODUCTION

The National Trust, owners of Bodiam Castle, commissioned an Archaeological and Historic Landscape Survey of its property (Johnson *et al.* 2000). Recommendations called for a programme of geophysical survey to establish whether the known Roman road actually passes through Dokes Field, north-west of the castle and part of its estates, as it was expected that the western part of this field would be leased to East Sussex County Council for a school sports field, which would entail machine levelling. Several alternative routes have been proposed in the past.

A number of local and professional archaeology groups were invited to carry out surveys independently during 2010, to enable comparison to be made between results from a variety of technologies. Hastings Area Archaeological Research Group (HAARG) was granted a licence and the work was carried out between 17 and 30 April 2010. A more detailed report and discussion appeared in *HAARG Journal New Series* **29** (Summer 2010), 1–9.

GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The site is within the High Weald, a series of ridges which trend west–east. The underlying sandstones of the Ashdown Beds are capped on most ridges by Wadhurst Clay. The north–south line of the Roman road strikes at right angles to these valleys, following a very undulating line, so long sighting alignments would not have been possible.